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HEART DISEASE AND INDO-PEOPLE

Increased Risk – Increased Prevention

by Dr VS Rambihar

The Indo-Caribbean person is at increased risk of developing heart disease (and diabetes). Being Indo- or Indian is associated with this increased risk, but not in everyone, since there are many people of Indian origin living long and healthy lives.

The Indo "Culture" or the way Indo or Indo-Caribbean people live, help cause or may increase this risk further. The acquisition of North America's lifestyle habits and excesses only makes it worse for us and our children.

The Indo people, everywhere, bear an excess burden of heart disease/diabetes and all of its consequences.

This means that extra effort must be made to reduce or remove the risk, including changing certain elements of our customs and ingrained habits that we hold dear, or may want to pass on to another generation as "heritage."

Anyone daring to propose changes to the customs of a people treads on dangerous ground.

Anyone exposed to the disproportionate amount of heart disease, death, illness, economic, personal and political consequences to the Indo people, their families and the community, failing to propose changes, treads on more dangerous ground.

The "other" risk factors for heart disease to which we are exposed include family history, smoking, high cholesterol and fats, lack of exercise, stress, diabetes, being overweight, and high blood pressure.

The more risk factors, the greater the risk of heart disease. Removing or modifying risk factors lowers the risk. Every little counts, at any age, and is as important in children as in adults.

There is, however, a degree of unpredictability to heart disease, explaining why exceptions exist and unexpected events occur, despite the general rule. This in no way, however, refutes the importance of the general rule.

Dietary Concerns

The Indo diet tends to be high risk. It relies on a lot of frying, uses a lot of dairy products and includes

several specific traditionally important items, like coconut and ghee (clarified butter), now considered high risk. Vegetarians sometimes negate the benefit of their diet by overindulgence in some high risk areas.

It is possible to eat sensibly and enjoy what you eat at the same time. You should challenge yourself, your family and friends, and your restaurants to create heart healthy and enjoyable food, for everyone's benefit.

The occasional use of aspirin and use of fish oils, garlic, etc. is also said to be of benefit.

Lifestyle changes require that we become more active. Leave the TV off more often, exercise, walk, run, jog, and generally be active, interested and involved. Avoid the tendency to dip too often into high risk snack foods, and to offer excessive amounts of high risk food as treats. It is not necessary to adopt the North American tendency to excess as in frequent large multiple scoops of ice cream, or helpings of dessert, just because it is there, or it's someone's special day.

Indian women are now more successful in escaping the stereotypes and custom of being overweight, short of exercise, and generally not visibly involved in the community. Indian men are not entirely immune to this. Remember the names of the great Indian athletes, and the great Indian leaders. It is up to us to produce many more.

We are all different. We cannot all be as active, as aggressive, as successful, or as interested in reducing risk, or in modifying lifestyle and diet. Some will ignore our pleas, while others will go to extremes. We each in our own way will do as much as possible, or as we feel necessary, or think reasonable in reducing risk.

There is much that can be done to reduce the excess risk of heart disease and diabetes in the Indo people of this world. **It, however, starts with you.**

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